

# Beer commercial taps Canadian patriotism



TORONTO (AP) — A Canadian everyman stands before a maple leaf flag and rants about igloos, blubber and hockey — a formula that has tapped Canada's patriotism and turned a beer commercial into a national sensation.

The ad has sparked standing ovations in movie theaters and hockey arenas, along with front-page newspaper coverage, by pumping Canadians' pride over what distinguishes them from the rest of the world — especially their neighbors to the south.

Nicknamed "The Rant," the ad that began running a month ago features a tousle-haired young man in a lumberjack shirt and jeans — dubbed Joe Canadian by the ad's creators.

It begins with Joe standing on a stage in front of a huge screen filled with the red maple leaf of the national flag.

"I'm not a lumberjack or fur trader," he begins, almost shyly. "I don't live in an igloo, eat blubber or own a dog sled."

With each pronouncement, the backdrop flashes a matching image — Canadian backwoodsmen, an igloo, a man eating blubber, a dog sled. Joe's voice rises with conviction.

"I have a prime minister, not a president. I speak English and French, not American, and I pronounce it 'about,' not 'a-boot,'" he says, a picture of a large rubber wading boot behind him.

"I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a proud and noble animal."

Joe is now shouting.

"Canada's the second-largest land mass, the first nation of hockey and the best part of North America," he concludes, arms raised in triumph. "My name is Joe, and I am Canadian!"

Quickly resuming his quiet demeanor, he offers a humble "thank you" and is gone.

To Canadians, the character touches a national nerve by setting straight the rest of the world, particularly the bigger and bossy neighbor to the south — not 'sooth,' as the stereotype of a Canadian accent would have it — about their country and themselves.

"It's kind of an educational thing, telling

Americans what we are and what we aren't," said Glen Hunt, the 35-year-old advertising executive for Bensimon Byrne D'Arcy, who wrote the ad.

"There's a little Joe in all of us, who want to stand up and say Canada's a great place, let's talk about it," said Hunt, who lived in New York for three years and heard his share of jokes about Canadians.

Almost lost in the media hubbub is the product being advertised — Molson Canadian beer. Brett Marchand, the Molson Canadian marketing vice president, said Bensimon Byrne D'Arcy won the account by encouraging the brewer to return to the "I am Canadian" theme of a previous campaign that ran from 1994-97.

Hunt got the idea when talking to young beer drinkers — Molson's target market — before pitching for the lucrative account last year.

"When they started talking about Canada, they were pretty low-key at first but it was almost like a dormant volcano," he said of the mostly mid-20s males. "People got very excited and very patriotic."

The themes of the spot — beer, hockey, multiculturalism, the environment — are prime elements of what Hunt called Canada's "patriotic DNA."

To Marchand, the theme appeals particularly to young Canadians who have more exposure to the world than previous generations through the Internet, cable and satellite television and travel.

"I think that's what makes them feel this really is a terrific place to live," he said.

The ad first appeared in movie theaters in March, and audience response was immediate, he said. It began airing on television with the Academy Awards show on March 26, and now has been performed live in theaters and hockey arenas.

The success surprised Jeff Douglas, the 28-year-old actor who portrays Joe Canadian.

He received a standing ovation after doing the commercial live at the Air Canada Center between periods of the Toronto-Ottawa Stanley Cup playoff game Saturday night.

"This thing has taken on a life of its own," Douglas later told The Toronto Star. "I don't think this is anything that a lot of people haven't already thought or said themselves."

"It's a very Canadian thing, the quiet pride we have, but once in a while, it's nice to wave the flag."

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